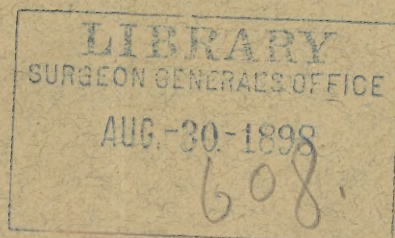


Holliday (B.W.)

The Civic Aspect of Some of the Common Neuroses.

BY

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THE CIVIC ASPECT OF SOME OF THE COMMON NEUROSES.¹

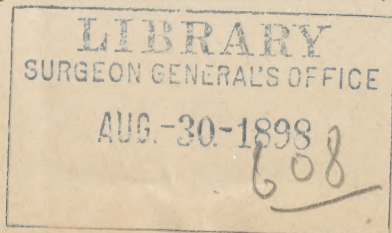
BY BENJ. W. HOLLIDAY, M.D., CLEVELAND, O.

It has been said that the present age is one of evolution and the past that of revolution. But evolution has ever been persistent. Revolution is but the tempest intermittingly following the deceptive calm of the former. Medicine has escaped neither the silent current of the one nor the boisterous turmoil of the other. The evolution of medicine has been the steady gainer by its revolutionary tendencies. Medicine pretends to be a worshiper of Nature, yet often antagonizes her methods and purposes. It applauds and imitates when it is helpless. It condemns and frustrates whenever it is conscious of puissance. Nature creates lavishly and destroys heartlessly. Her only response to appeal for mercy is: Let the fittest survive—if they can. Medicine rebels against this edict. It says: Let us meet Nature with her own weapons if need be—bacteria *versus* bacteria! Let us help the weak; the strong can take care of themselves. The one has as much right to life and happiness as the other.

Is our share in the rebellious work of civilization an assured and unmixed blessing to mankind? Our rugged forefathers used bleeding to get rid of exaggerated plethora; if that was not enough, calomel did the rest. Loyal subjects of Nature, assuredly, for only the "fittest" survived. And a goodly portion of these would have been much *fitter* if timber and whiskey had not been so very cheap. For the destruction of our majestic forests has been followed by a degenerated progeny—a "born-tired" multitude, begotten in exhaustion and destined to a life of conflict with a diseased mechanism unwilling in its response to the native impulses of will and inhibition. We must not lay too great a share of our degenerating ills to an immigrated flux of population.

To-day the cry of the anemic descendants of these worthy sires is not "Give us less blood," but "Give us more nerve and more sleep! Either will do if you can't give us both—we are in a hurry." We are justly accused of fast becoming a nation of asthenic neuropaths in our mad haste to deserve the contemptuous epithet of "Dollar Democracy." The rich chemists of Germany are profiting thereby, through their talents for devising hypnotics, analgesics and antipyretics for worn-out Yankees. The rest of the country is being entertained and taxed by a very rapid increase and enlargement of

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lunatic asylums, private hospitals and retreats, nerve specialists and semi-specialists without number and, very often, without conscience.

The reckless expense of borrowed force in the shape of alcohol, opium, and the lesser narcotics threaten a stamina bankruptcy of wide-spread extent. The extremes of fanatical meddlesomeness on the one side, and statecraft negligence or impotence on the other, are responsible for leaving to the scattered forces of society, not least of which is medicine, to warn and patch the best they may. On the other hand our own altruism, whether faddish or paradoxically selfish, is dangerously near fatuity in its defense of weakness.

Our example and voice are not strong enough nor influential enough in securing adaptation to environment—adaptation in mode of living, marriage license, choice of occupation, educational methods, and medico-legal enactment. Our aim should have a higher reach than dominant specialism and dosage.

A few mistakingly boast of a philanthropy that will ultimately end in auto-eviction from a professional livelihood when State laboratories and health-office proclamations will supplant or revolutionize the good old doctor's ways of beneficence. But while preventive medicine is taking the place of haphazard and futile therapeutics, the curative method is becoming more reliable—not only more rational and positive, but more fertile in resource, selective in action, and optional in channels of operation. The Hippocratic ideal "*Vis medicatrix naturæ*," unaided by the genius of man, is a played-out worship.

Medicine is apparently narrowing down in its primary pathology to two principal characteristics, viz., germ infected cells and overtaxed neurons. And to all appearances these are not likely to prove transient theories to be knocked down by the next generation, and added to the rubbish heap for the delectation of our next centennial chroniclers. They represent the revolutionary field-work of the last quarter century, and outline the evolution of the next century. The future will not lack a Hunter or a Bichat to unravel the mysteries of the ganglionic system that directs the battles of these cells. It is enough for our own generation to have recognized the genuineness of those battles; that they initiate, preoccupy and terminate the state we call *human life*. We have learned anew humility and wonderment in our aggressive spirit of inquiry, which has discovered the unit "speck of protoplasm" and that we ourselves are but an aggregate of those specks, and that our proud altitude is but a higher differentiation of them; that the domicile of our *ego* is but a mass of highly differentiated and coordinated ame-

boid faculties of attraction and repulsion, of absorption, secretion, and excretion; that these are but a state of correlated force—in essence an experiment of God beyond the ken of man.

With respect to the diseases which we now recognize as having a germ-infected cell origin, to say nothing of those yet to be ascertained, we can but feel amazed and elated at what has been accomplished in discovery, sanitary prevention, and even cure. But there may be some offsetting sequences counting towards deteriorating neuroses, which will be equally embarrassing for future solution. Excessive demand for stimulants and narcotics may be only one of them. In short the eradication of one trunk of tendencies may quicken the growth of the other.

It is not quite a century (1798) since Jenner published his "Inquiry into the Causes and Effects of the *Variolæ Vaccinæ*," which has practically excluded the ravages of smallpox from all enlightened communities. Whether the removal of this scourge, and so far checkmating Nature's slaughtering, has added to our neurotic tendencies is likely to remain debatable until we know more about the mysteries of metabolism and trophic centers and conduits.

The addition of iodine to our specific armament (1831) has rendered syphilis far less horrible than formerly. No doubt if the victims would extend their probation of intelligent treatment and abstinence it could be added to the list of thoroughly eradicable diseases. But an interrupted attention allows it to stalk abroad unheeded by the subject and unnoticed by the public, and occasionally end up respectably under the guise of general paresis, locomotor ataxia, or otherwise. But it has not ceased to frequently and pathetically bear a succession of degenerates to multiply our protean inclinations to morbidity.

Next to the potential extinction of these disgusting poxes, which distinguishes the progress of our art during the first part of this remarkable century, we may note the ability acquired during the last part of the same centurial period to extirpate two lesser plagues to humanity. It is not impossible that the day is near at hand when it will be considered a disgrace to contract typhoid fever or to die of it when contracted, so well known is its natural history and improving treatment. Nearly the same may be said of diphtheria. And with the removal of these germ catastrophes, not a few items of neurotic resultants will join their departure.

The civic valuation of progress in sanitation and bacteriology, resulting in our comparative safety against future invasions of

Asiatic and tropical diseases, in the form of devastating epidemics, is not to be appraised with reference simply to the saved lives and commerce of a nation, nor yet to the temporary gloom and suffering attending them. Their effects extend far into the future in many ways. Germane to our subject, they leave their powerful impress on the nervous organizations of generations to come, long into the future. In the fourteenth century the epidemics, particularly the bubonic, "swept away one-fourth of the population of the old world in four years." England lost double that proportion in a few months (Hecker). But their residuum, through biogenesis, was not limited to that century. Who can say that we are quite free from it to this day? For of all atavisms except combativeness, hysteria is the most persistent because it is not notably prone to sterility. We do not have exact reproductions of "dancing manias" or flagellating processions, but we still have our out-campings of contagious suggestions that sometimes seem to be not very far removed from them. Dr. Hecker, in his history of the Epidemics of the Middle Ages, remarks that "the tendencies of the mind, the turn of thought of whole ages, have frequently depended on prevailing diseases."

Next to these achievements of our science, which make for a modification of our neuropathic proclivities, stands our gained knowledge of the nature and contagiousness of tuberculosis. Our expectations from the tuberculin treatment are not fully realized, but the antidote can be further perfected, or perhaps found anew. What we have learned in the way of prophylaxis, by recognition of its preventable contagion, will count far towards our protection. If Nature refuses to render this disease sterile, intelligent legislation can do very much more in that direction than has yet been done. A common sense of self-defense will not allow the continuance of the fact which Cornet states (Wilson), viz., that "at least one-third of all mankind are or have been affected with tuberculosis." This percentage seems questionably large, but due, no doubt, to the increasing acquaintance with this greatest scourge of a peaceable civilization. Granting our highest anticipations for its ultimate decrease and comparative removability, the inherited liability to its recurrence and corresponding residue of weakened neurons will sufficiently occupy our successors long into the future, if not always.

There is one menace to our nerve peace, not so calamitous in its immediate aspect as some of those recited, but quite as etiological in its diabolical prevalence. It may even be questioned whether it should not itself be styled a common neurosis, which breeds others

of such a distinct individuality that their ancestry is lost only in appearance, rather than reality, by the veil of time and circumstance. This disease is so commonly known, so democratic in its attachments, so cosmopolitan in its habitat, that one almost hesitates to mention it in connection with our topic. But notwithstanding its universal familiarity it remains the *bête noire* among all general diseases. Its name is *rheumatism*. It is a disease not limited to the human race. The active doctor has often witnessed it as a cause of suffering in his favorite horse and hunting dog. It is a disease from exposure and fatigue. It is distinctly a human disease, at least in its chronic form, only when that exposure and fatigue are representative of selfish vice or venture, inherited or acquired. The inherited predisposition to rheumatism probably amounts to a larger percentage than is currently believed. Whatever its disputed primary nature, the fact has been claimed (Richardson) that "rheumatism is a base of more chronic diseases than any other complaint." Its association with chorea, sciatica, neuralgias, functional and inflammatory, melancholy, muscular spasms, insomnia, nervous dyspepsia, occasional painful delirium, irregular and weakened heart action, a multitude of vasomotor disturbances, including faulty elimination of vito-chemical poisons; above all, its kindred relationship to alcoholism and morphinism—all these are trite experiences of the all-round physician; and it is to the latter that this paper is specially addressed by one of their number.

The disproportionate growth of cities, the marvelous results and possibilities of invention—these are the revolutionary forces of our newest civilization. The latter has become synonymous with the determined winning of supposed comforts, with or without the consent of Nature. It is attended by nervous wreckage as well as other kinds. Bright's disease, diabetes, so-called "heart failure," are fashionable terms when they have a neurotic initiation. Our ill vertebrated and spectacled schoolchildren must speak for themselves through their specialists. Beard's term "neurasthenia" describes a good deal of this wreckage because it is loaded with some fifty specifications, called "symptoms of nervous exhaustion." It will hit almost anything that is respectable because fashionable. Nevertheless, to be fair, it has a useful and permanent aptness in nosology.

To conclude this crude presentment, the appeal may be made that as most of the common neuroses are not unknown in the "desolation following the wake of war" and monetary panics, they should receive a civic recognition through statesmanship equal, at least, to the highest level of politics.

MEDICINE



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HAROLD N. MOYER, M.D., EDITOR.

